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KING CESAR HOUSE

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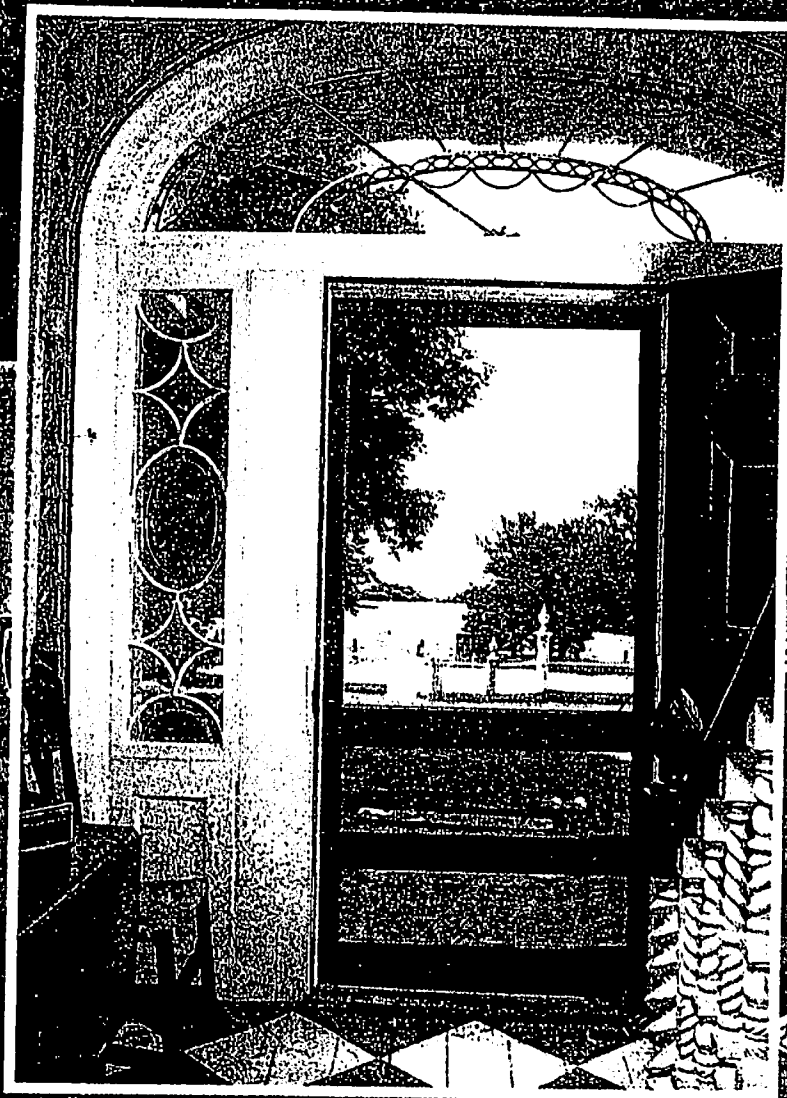


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HISTORIC HOUSES

A Federal-era mansion allows us a glimpse of the good life as it was lived ca. 1809-1842, through its architecture and its owners' decorating choices.

The now-serene view of Duxbury Harbor once encompassed a bustling wharf and shipbuilding enterprise. **BACKGROUND:** The French scenic wallpaper was hung during the 1820s.



King Caesar

EZRA WESTON JR. was the second Weston to bear the nickname King Caesar. He built this mansion on the harbor in Duxbury, Massachusetts, in 1809. Its original architectural details, paint colors, and wallpapers reveal something of the personal-

ities of the home's first residents.

The mansion's owner inherited the honorific from his father, who began building ships before the American Revolution. Taking the helm of the business when his father died in 1822, Ezra Jr. built one of America's largest merchant fleets: 20 ships transporting cot-

ton and other goods, sailing to the Black Sea, Asia Minor, the Western Mediterranean, along the Eastern Seaboard, and to New Orleans. During the 1830s, the company's annual gross income was a million dollars. In 1833, King Caesar II opened his own bank; in 1834, he established his Ten Acre

BY GLADYS MONTGOMERY | PHOTOGRAPHY BY GREG PREMUR



Ship Yard in Duxbury; and in 1841 he built *Hope*, which, at 880 tons, was New England's largest vessel.

"If King Caesar were alive today, that's probably what he'd want to stress," says museum director Patrick Browne, whose book *King Caesar of Duxbury* details the shipping magnate's career.

Overlooking a wharf and the centerpiece of a 100-acre farm on Powder Point, the mansion was Weston's business headquarters. It was

surrounded by mills for lumber and sailcloth, and by workshops for carpenters, blacksmiths, sailmakers, rope makers, and other outfitters.

The house's symmetrical, two-storey plan consists of a center hallway flanked by two rooms on each side, and four chimneys serving eight fireplaces. Interiors are Neoclassical masterpieces with columned mantels, window seats, wainscoting, and dentil, rope, and cable mouldings ex-

pressing Weston's maritime associations. Federal decoration often included visual references to the new Republic: the front door's elliptical fanlight features delicate leaded tracery outlining stars, and its sidelights contain thirteen panes to honor the original colonies.

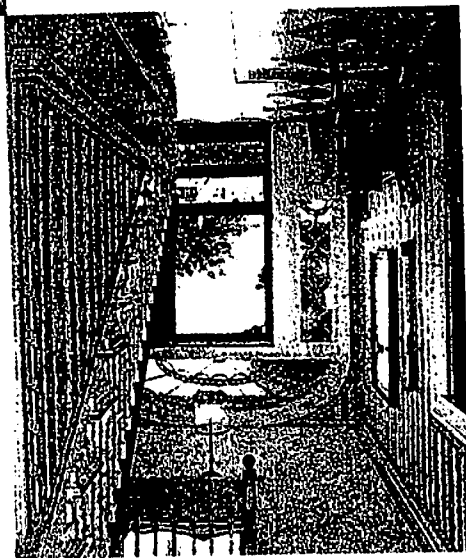
For the parlors, Ezra Jr. and his wife Jerusha chose costly, hand-blocked scenic wallpapers from France. The elegant "Le Parc Français" enhances

the formal West Parlor, while "Les Incas," a depiction of Pizarro's 1531 conquest of Peru, which was used in the family's East Parlor sitting room, resonates with King Caesar's career.

When King Caesar died in 1842, Jerusha [née Bradford; one of her family's Duxbury houses is also a museum] retained the house, which remained in family hands until 1937. Between 1886 and 1937, during which time the mansion was used as a boys'

Scenic Papers

Imported from France were the epitome of taste. The Mansion has "Le Parc Français," made ca. 1825 by Jacquemart et Bénard [at right]; and "Les Incas," made in 1826 by Dufour et Leroy, which shows Pizarro's conquest of Peru [at left]. These companies, as well as Zuber, created landscapes depicting exotic locales, narratives, and bucolic scenery. Ceiling to chair rail, scenics created a non-repeating panorama. They were costly because a carved block was needed to print each color and each section of a design. Most scenics required from 300 to 700 separate blocks; some by Dufour used 1500 and up to 5000.



school, the staircase was reconfigured and given a pineapple newel post, and the Inca wallpaper was moved from the first floor to the second. The Duxbury Historical Society, owner after 1965, had the wallpaper returned to its original location, and rebuilt the Federal staircase using balusters from three historic buildings. Paint experts researched and reapplied white, tan, and grey colors on woodwork. The mansion retains

OPPOSITE: In the East Parlor, wallpaper depicting Pizarro's conquest of Peru and an expensive mahogany card table were fitting choices for a merchant whose ships were plying the globe. The 1810 tall clock is by John Bailey. Above, in the formal West Parlor, a silver coffee service echoes the elegance of the French scene wallpaper. BELOW: A portrait of Ezra Weston Jr. overlooks the exquisite leaded doorway and wallpaper he chose.





Wallpaper borders "panelizing" dining room walls, and Empire chairs around an 1815 table of three re-arrangeable sections, reflect the 1840s, when Jerusha Weston had the room enlarged. Portraits depict her and Daniel Webster. **BELOW:** In the West Parlor, recently reproduced carpet is based on the Federal-era color scheme. (Oriental carpets are from an earlier interpretation of rooms.)



few Weston pieces; much of the mahogany furniture, which accurately reflects the refined taste of the time, came from the Winsor family, also prominent Duxbury merchants.

Choices made by Ezra and Jerusha Weston are evocative still. Besides paint colors and wallpapers, these include portraits done around 1793 by folk artist Rufus Hathaway. (Those in the house are copies; originals are in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller collection at Colonial Williamsburg.) King Caesar is portrayed when he was 22, a clerk in his father's firm and soon to be married. Jerusha may look dour, but her suppressed smile

and feather-festooned hat give her away: "The portrait doesn't do her justice," Browne says. "She was reportedly vivacious and pleasant."

That makes sense. Would a dour person have chosen that zippy chaise in the kitchen, or the front-hall wallpaper (reproduced by Brunswick from an original fragment)—an exuberant orange, Prussian blue, and lime stripe? The West Parlor's period-authentic wall-to-wall carpet, a reproduction from J.R. Burrows, is a vibrant orange and blue medallion design. "The colors came from the original scheme," says Browne. "We think the Westons would have liked it." ✦

Federal-style colors, such as the deep reds, blues, and greens, are used in the interior. The original blue sets off an 1815 Sheraton mahogany dresser probably by Boston cabinet-maker John Seymour. (Bed hangings are currently being redone.)



The Weston bedroom's original blue sets off an 1815 Sheraton mahogany dresser probably by Boston cabinet-maker John Seymour. (Bed hangings are currently being redone.)



ABOVE A Federal-style fence with urn finials and a concave curve at the gate enhances the stately symmetry of the façade. The kitchen's character is reflected in pewter on the mantel, the fireplace with crane, and the pantry's display of transferware. **LEFT** In a bedchamber, woodwork includes unusual zigzag mouldings and Neoclassical detailing. Period-accurate window treatments are in a Brunswick & Fils reproduction fabric.